

**Consideration of Recommendation of Petition Regarding Adding Albino Red-Eared Sliders to the Reptile Captive Breeding License; Administrative Cause No. 10-035D**

**INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**

**Albino Red-Eared Sliders – Captive Breeding and Possession**

**Background Information**

The Natural Resources Commission received the attached petition to allow albino red-eared sliders to be bred in captivity and sold under the reptile captive breeding license in Indiana. The petitioner, John Tinius, Jr., would specifically like to possess more than four (4) albino red-eared sliders, as well as breed and sell them under the reptile captive breeding license.

**Current Laws**

The Indiana DNR currently allows an individual to possess no more than four (4) red-eared sliders under 312 IAC 9-5-6. A person can currently take no more than four (4) from the wild or possess more than 4 per species.

Currently, the DNR allows the sale of albino red-eared sliders that were not collected from the wild.

*312 IAC 9-5-7 Sale of reptiles and amphibians native to Indiana*

*...(f) A reptile or amphibian that is not on a state or federal endangered or threatened species list and with a color morphology that is:*

- (1) albinistic (an animal lacking brown or black pigment);*
- (2) leucistic (a predominately white animal); or*
- (3) xanthic (a predominately yellow animal);*

*is exempted from this section if it was not collected from the wild.*

The purpose for allowing these three color morphologies was to continue to allow those that were rarely found in the wild and commonly found in the pet industry to be sold. If one of these color morphologies were found in the wild, the turtle would be more vulnerable to predation and not be likely to survive.

Only certain species of snakes (no turtles) can be sold under a reptile captive breeding license pursuant to 312 IAC 9-5-9. These species that are allowed to be sold are those that have self-sustaining populations throughout the state and are more common in the pet industry.

**Fish and Wildlife Resource Information**

The Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife strives to maintain viable populations of our native species for present and future generations. Due to increased funding and new environmental concerns, research on reptiles and amphibians is currently occurring at a

faster pace. The dynamic nature of this research leads to rapidly evolving changes in reptile and amphibian management and regulation.

The sale of red-eared sliders and other turtles native to Indiana was prohibited in 1998 as the result of effects on our native species through the previously-unlimited collection and sale of native species for the commercial pet trade, as well as for other uses including food and medicine. A multi-year law enforcement investigation also revealed that a large number of reptiles and amphibians were being taken from the wild in Indiana and sold throughout the country, including endangered species. Red-eared sliders are common throughout Indiana and are frequently sold in other states as pets.

Additionally, the continuing threats to amphibians and reptiles include the following:

- Loss of habitat

The amount of habitat available for amphibians and reptiles in Indiana has decreased over the last century. In fact, scientists believe that approximately 88 percent of Indiana's natural wetlands are gone. It is known that many species depend on wetlands for all or a portion of their life cycle.

- Sensitivity to environmental contaminants

Increased contaminants in the environment have negative impacts on reproduction in amphibians and reptiles.

- Increased taking

Taking of amphibians and reptiles for local and especially foreign trade (for food and pets) continues to cause declines in populations.

- Dispersal ability

Suitable habitat is becoming more fragmented. Habitat fragmentation raises new concerns about the ability of reptiles and amphibians to maintain current populations and recolonize restored habitats.

Turtle trade (for pets, food or medicinal purposes) remains a threat to native turtle populations across the world. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), along with several foreign countries, are actively working on the conservation and management of freshwater turtles. In 2010, AFWA held a national workshop entitled "Conservation and Trade Management of Freshwater and Terrestrial Turtles in the U.S.". This workshop was attended by relevant state and federal agency natural resource staff (biological and law enforcement), AFWA staff, Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC), select non-governmental conservation organizations (NGOs) and other experts to discuss the pressing management, regulatory, scientific, and enforcement needs associated with the harvest and trade of freshwater turtles in the United States. One finding from this meeting was that turtle farming likely leads to continued harvest of wild breeding stock, illegal laundering of poached wild animals, genetic pollution, and spread of disease into the wild.

### **Recommendation**

The Division of Fish and Wildlife recommends not proposing a rule that would allow the breeding of albino red-eared sliders and subsequent sale of these turtles under a reptile

captive breeding license. With regard to the request of Mr. Tinius Jr. to possess more than 4 red-eared sliders, an individual can currently apply for a Turtle Possession Permit under 312 IAC 9-5-11 to possess more than four (4) red-eared sliders that were lawfully obtained, but these turtles cannot be bred, sold, traded, bartered, or released into the wild. Under this permit, the petitioner could have an unlimited number of albino red-eared sliders.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife must provide for the protection, reproduction, care, management, survival and regulation of wild animal populations regardless of whether the wild animals are present on public or private property in Indiana. Rules must be based upon data relative to the following: 1) the welfare of the wild animal 2) the relationship of the wild animal to other animals and 3) the welfare of people.

Albinism is a deleterious, recessive trait that occurs in low frequency in the wild and is associated with reduced fitness and vigor in animals. Pigmentation is protective and many albino specimens have vision and other health problems that will reduce their fitness even in captivity. The selective breeding that would need to occur to guarantee a completely albino clutch would likely further reduce the genetic vigor of the captive population. Some matings can produce typical-colored individuals and albinos. Captive produced typical-colored individuals will cause enforcement problems as they will be indistinguishable from wild-caught specimens. Turtles can be relatively long-lived animals. Captive produced albino and typical-colored specimens often outlive the interest of their human owners. Many of these unwanted animals are released to the wild, where if they live long enough to breed, they can reduce the fitness of the overall population. Additionally, captive reared animals can carry diseases harmful to free-ranging populations. Increasing the frequency of albino animals is not consistent with the protection, care, survival and management of red-eared sliders. Therefore, it is not in the best interest of the captive turtles, wild turtle populations or people to produce more turtle specimens with the deleterious albino trait.